



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Supervisors Act to Examine and Improve Realignment Services**

The Board of Supervisors today imposed greater oversight on the County Probation Department, which has been struggling to provide services to the inmates recently released from state facilities who now must rely on local agencies for help.

Last October, the state shifted responsibility for certain inmates to the counties. Since then, the state has released to local supervision more than 5,000 offenders who were convicted of non-serious, non-violent, and non-sexual crimes. The Probation Department, which is charged with providing released inmates with rehabilitative services such as mental health and substance abuse counseling, housing and job training, has had little success in fulfilling that obligation. Since February, the department has referred only 60% of former inmates to services, of which only 15% actually have received treatment.

The Supervisors today called for more accountability from the department. Acting on a motion sponsored by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, the Board unanimously called for staff to develop a feasibility plan to ascertain how best to expeditiously increase the number of released prisoners who receive rehabilitative services.

To ensure that this target is reached, as part of the motion, staff is directed to examine clear performance goals for both referring departments and agencies,

locate referring County service providers, and ensure participation of community- and faith-based organizations.

Officials from the Probation Department told the Supervisors that significant progress already has been made. For example, 48% of those who need mental health services are now receiving treatment. Implementing AB 109, the state's realignment program, has been a challenge, said Cal Remington, the department's chief deputy, but Probation increasingly is mandating that the former inmates comply with orders to receive therapeutic and other services.

"Early on we found that many of these coming out with problems did not have a condition that allowed us to, in essence, mandatorily refer them," Remington said. Now, he said, the department is implementing the use of low-level violations and sanctions on a case-by-case basis.

Representatives from several community-based organizations spoke in favor of the motion; however, some urged the County to resist creating a structure of mandates and resulting violations that could lead to the re-incarceration of returning prisoners.

"We think it's a positive step," said Kim McGill of the Youth Justice Coalition. She added that those returning often are hindered in their efforts to comply. The lack of a valid or government-issued identification card, without which they often cannot access educational, housing and health care services, presents an enormous hurdle for many attempting to comply with Probation's orders.

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas emphasized that having the department clearly spell out its guidelines is essential for a successful reentry scenario.

"The matter is urgent," the Supervisor said. "If we do not see substantially more people receiving the treatment and services they need, no one will be well served; public safety will be undermined and the cycle of recidivism will continue unabated.

It is imperative, the Supervisor continued, that the County not duplicate the State's abysmal recidivism rate; about 65% of former inmates return to prison within three years.

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